

CAOI



CASINO 2001: *A Spectacle of 21<sup>st</sup> -Century Curiosities*

Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn

*A simple wood cabinet. Closed, it is a minimalist blank slate. Open, it is a cluttered assortment of objects. A man's world in miniature, it contains sporting paraphernalia, toy locomotives, tidy rows of pill-boxes, paperweights and rubber stamps. Dusted with care, these shelves contain the bric-a-brac of faraway places: a toy boat from Istanbul; matching compact cases – one found in a flea market in Milan, the other in Vienna; a Japanese enameled box from Seoul. An empty vase flaunts the proffered flowers of past lovers. A crucifix lying askew whispers the Rosary. A little girl with pigtails presides.*

This Cabinet of Curiosities belongs to Jan Hoet. Kept in his office at S.M.A.K., it houses his memories. Each individual souvenir embodies a sentimental travelogue of personal significance. While they are ordinary objects, toys of utility, belonging to the world of craft, they are imbued with the discreet history of this man. Together, they form a composite narrative of their possessor, a self-enclosed collection steeped in private associations and nostalgia for different times and places.

The curio cabinet emerged as a cultural entity in the period of British Mercantilism, between 1688 and 1763.<sup>1</sup> One of the cabinet's distinctive attributes is the intentional removal of the chosen objects from their origins in order to tell a new story. The beloved toy of childhood rubs elbows with an heirloom, an exotic import and an unusual example of natural life. As Susan Stewart has described, such collections of souvenirs 'form a compendium which is an autobiography. Scrapbooks, memory, quilts, photo albums, and baby books all serve as examples.'<sup>2</sup>

A number of conceptual European artists have experimented with such collections of curiosities. The *Block Beuys*, installed at the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1968, displayed miscellaneous manufactured objects and animal substances gathered and set into vitrines by the artist.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after, in 1972, Marcel Broodthaers exhibited objects all bearing some relationship to the eagle (deemed his own Museum of Modern Art) at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle. Below each eagle, a label read: 'This is not a work of art.' Claus Oldenberg's *Mouse Museum*, a collection of 385 tiny toys and miniatures mass-produced for our consumer society, followed in 1992. For the opening of *Documenta IX* in 1992, Haim Steinbach created a portrait of Hoet by appropriating the individual contents of his Cabinet of Curiosities and re-arranging them on a wooden base. Jan Hoet's Cabinet, then, both belongs to and has inspired collection-based art.



Malerie Marder, Jan Hoet, 2001

I have used Hoet's Cabinet as a barometer against which to measure the art chosen for CASINO 2001. If a work of art could be conceptually contained within the Cabinet, then it did not fit this exhibition. The artworks found here could never belong among Hoet's nostalgic keepsakes. *Casino* rejects the leisure activity of private collecting. *Casino* leaves behind trinkets, amulets, good-luck charms and souvenirs. This exhibition resides in the realm of the post-collection.

In preparing this catalogue, I asked the artists to collect visual images that influenced their works featured in this exhibition. Together, these pages represent a future vision of the cabinet of curiosities and are my homage to Jan Hoet and his souvenirs. Movie stills, advertisements, record jackets, trademarks and reproductions of artworks replace the personally significant and consequentially precious objects of Hoet's cabinet. The genre of portraiture, for example, receives a 21<sup>st</sup>-century face-lift, but not before slipping back into the 18th-century strategies of waxwork and court portraiture. Here, portraits are of re-configured action heroes and heroines who inhabit a world of blob architecture and duel with Lara Croft. Many of the images, chosen separately by the CASINO 2001 artists, overlap. Such coincidence bears witness to a collective, rather than hermetic, individualized memory. Here, nostalgia and sentiment are out. Popular culture and entertainment reign. Personal narrative has been replaced with style. Thanks to Photoshop, seamless vision and flat surfaces subplant the art of collage. The images chosen are not important to these artists as metonymic associations, but rather formal and conceptual ones. By reconfiguring recognizable references, the artists have thus created new and often critical contexts for the familiar.

Likewise, the individual artist's pages function as individual cabinets of curiosities. Designed by Scott Hug, the separate pages read as didactic, even encyclopedic, entries, the artists having defined their works by outside sources. As if lifted from their studio walls, these images bear clues to the artists' works. Yet, again, the clues are deeply post-historical. These artists have collapsed the past and present by denying any cleavage between the two time periods. Rejecting the need for authenticity, they have freely taken images whose individual histories are no longer relevant.

This feature, shared by so many of the artists, inspired the title of this exhibition. The symbolism and mythology of Las Vegas and its casinos are built on the present and the erasure of the past. The great cities that Las Vegas has reproduced in miniature, like Paris or Venice, are emptied of history, allusions stripped bare of their original contexts. Exotic foreign locales are rendered accessible and safe: no language, currency or political uprising interferes with their entertainment value. Built like a Hollywood stage-set, Las Vegas is a façade, a theme-park version of the United States, where living spaces, shopping and entertainment are bundled together into themed environments. Thus, Libby Lumpkin's essay *Loving Las Vegas: Fine Art and Entertainment*.

Las Vegas is rapidly doing what democratic culture does – leveling class distinctions and demolishing cultural ones. There, art and entertainment merge, so high, low, and middle-brow blend into a consumer friendly no-brow. What remains is the phenomenal and the spectacular. As Peter Wollen has observed, '[v]isual display is the other side of spectacle: the side of production rather than consumption or reception, the designer rather



Malerie Marder, Jan Hoet 2, 2001

<sup>1</sup> James H. Bunn, *The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism*, in: *New Literary History* 11, (1980), p.304.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, Duke University Press, Durham, London, 1993, p.144.

<sup>3</sup> Since 1970, the *Block Beuys* is housed at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt.

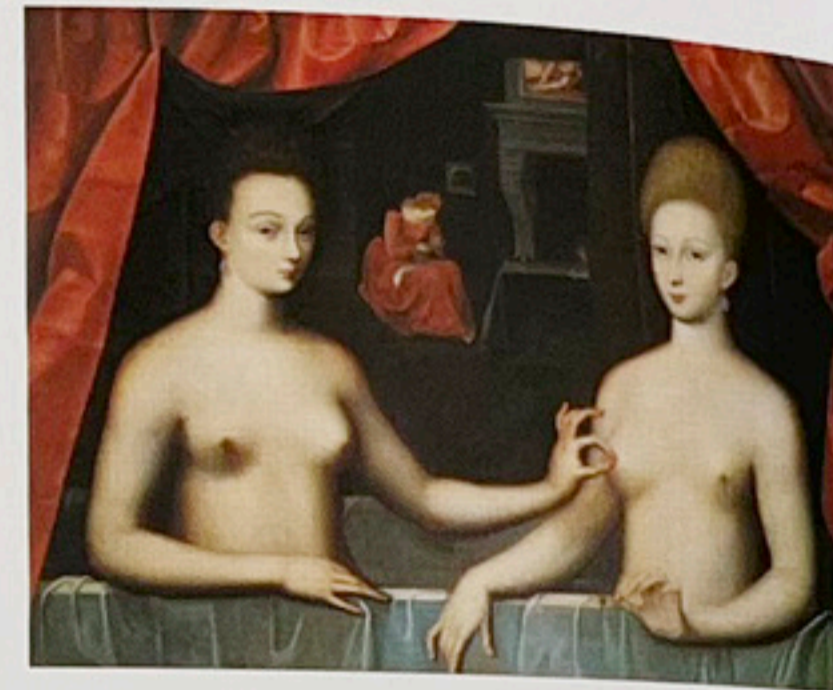
<sup>4</sup> Cooke, Lynne en Peter Wollen, *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1995, p.9.

<sup>5</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle*, New York, Zone Books, 1994.

than the viewer.<sup>4</sup> This exhibition, accordingly, not only responds to the collection but also explores the Spectacle. Almost 30 years ago, Guy Debord defined our culture as ‘The Society of the Spectacle’ (1967).<sup>5</sup> For Debord, the Spectacle spoke of an image-based world of advertising, movies and television that transmogrified lived experience, depleted it, and ultimately replaced it in an act of homogenous consumption. Midori Matsui’s essay for this catalogue picks up where Debord, the Situationists, as well as the 80’s Simulationists left off. Using critical theory, she questions the accessibility of art today as well as its strategies of Spectacle. Like many of the artists in this exhibition, she strips the Spectacle of awe.

As with all spectacles, the glittering surface reality has a darker underbelly – addiction, corruption and violence. The shadow of this lineage has left its trace upon these artists who simultaneously thrive within popular culture and approach it with a subversive eye. Lars Bang Larsen, in his dynamic essay, *#1 Years: A Tail of Sparks* explores this culture of stylized and mannered violence, like many of the works in the exhibition. Ultimately, *CASINO 2001* is less concerned with the technological possibilities of our branded age than with the psychological costs of inhabiting it.

*60 artists and a TV star: 23 live in America, 24 were born in the 1970s, 25 work in video, 26 are women... Inside the museum a playboy bunny leans against a McDonald’s arch. Patty Hearst storms Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey. A Caravaggio boy stares out from a Donald Judd box. And the Tin Man falls for a model in a Gucci ad. Warhol’s Poppies become a floor carpet while Cary Grant smokes in the buff. Degas’ Bather is at once reconfigured into a body contortionist and a stealth fighter. Liza, Frank and Sammy preside.*



*clockwise from top left:*  
 Lewis Carroll, Plate 3: Evelyn Hatch, 1879  
 Artist and sister, photo, 1982  
 École de Fontainebleau, Gabrielle d'Estrées and one of her sisters, c. 1595  
 Charley Ray, Family Romance, 1993  
 Tod Papageorge, Beach, 1978  
 Édouard Manet, Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, 1863  
 Malerie Marder, Communal Fire, Hollywood, California, c-print, 2001  
 Steven Shore, Untitled, 1972  
 Malerie Marder, Communal Fire, Hollywood, California, c-print, 2001



Malerie Marder, Bath House, Culver City, California, 2001, c-print, 48 x 60 inches (121.9 x 152.4cm). Courtesy: Artemis Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, New York